

WONDERFUL NARRATIVE
OF
LIEUT. HARRISON.



This Cut represents the Mine in which I was first confined.



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THE
THRILLING, STARTLING AND WONDERFUL
NARRATIVE
OF
LIEUTENANT HARRISON,

WHO WAS TAKEN PRISONER AT GOLIAD, TEXAS, IN 1836,

AND ONLY ESCAPED THE TREACHEROUS MURDER OF HIS COMPANION

BY THE INHUMAN MEXICANS, TO BE TRANSFERRED TO A
PUNISHMENT WORSE THAN DEATH, NAMELY,

THE MINES OF MEXICO;

FROM WHICH HE SUCCEEDED IN MAKING HIS ESCAPE, AND SUBSE-

QUENTLY JOINING COL. DONIPHAN'S COMMAND, ON ITS WAY

FROM CALIFORNIA ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS, BY WHICH

MEANS HE AGAIN REACHED THE UNITED STATES.

FULL PARTICULARS ARE GIVEN, IN THE BOOK, OF HIS

TRIALS, SUFFERINGS, AND BRUTAL TREATMENT

IN THE MINES; WHICH ARE ALSO ACCURATELY DESCRIBED; TOGETHER

WITH THE PRISONERS; THE OVERSEERS; MODE OF LIVING

RATIONS; THEIR CHASTISEMENTS; CHAINS; PUN-

ISHMENT IN THE BLACK HOLE, ETC., ETC.

THE WHOLE TOGETHER FORMING

ONE OF THE MOST WONDERFUL AND THRILLINGLY
INTERESTING BOOKS EVER PUBLISHED

CINCINNATI:

AND BY THE AUTHOR

1846

THE

THIRTIETH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE

UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1891

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LIEUTENANT HARRISON'S

WONDERFUL, THRILLING AND STARTLING DISCLOSURES.

It is not my purpose, in the present pages, to say any thing of myself, farther than is absolutely necessary to make my story interesting to the reader; therefore I trust I shall be pardoned for omitting all account of my earlier career, and coming at once to the last and most eventful years of my life.

The fall of the Alamo and the massacre of its one hundred and forty inmates, among whom was the lamented Colonel Travis, which took place in the latter part of February, 1836, and the subsequent battle of San Jacinto, and the murders at Goliad, form three bloody epochs in the history of Texas, which are already recorded and known throughout the civilized world. It is of the latter that I am now going to speak—I being at that time an officer in one of the unfortunate regiments which surrendered to the blood-thirsty Mexicans.

I do not know the precise number of my companions, but I think there were in the neighborhood of four hundred. We had been completely surrounded and hard pressed at Goliad for some days, during which time we could get no tidings of any reinforcement being at hand, when one morning to our surprise we saw the bearer of a flag of truce approaching, and all was anxiety to know the cause—some anticipating one thing and some another. At length it was made known that Santa Anna (a curse upon the incarnate fiend) wished to

hold a parley with our commander for the purpose of effecting a peace and saving further bloodshed. This to us, who were completely surrounded by an enemy of ten times our number, and who could scarce hope for any thing short of eventually being cut to pieces—proved, as will readily be imagined, most joyful tidings. The interview desired was readily granted, during which a proposition was made by Santa Anna himself, to the effect that, if our gallant little army would surrender ourselves prisoners to the Mexicans, we should have good treatment and be shipped back to the United States—most of my companions as well as myself being from there—at the expense of the Mexican government. This to soldiers in our condition, many of us thousands of miles from home, and, as before said, hemmed in by an enemy who, should they succeed in capturing, would put us at once to the sword—this, I say, under the circumstances, was joyful news, and seemed a liberal offer; so much so, that after a slight consultation among the superior officers, it was accepted, and the articles of capitulation signed—those on the part of the Mexicans by Santa Anna himself.

Never did I experience more joy than at the prospect of once more returning to my native land; and this I could perceive also in the faces of my companions; for we had all endured uncommon hardships during the preceding winter, many of us being almost naked, and sometimes entirely destitute of food. Where but a short time previous were seen nothing but looks of gloom and despondency, I now beheld happy faces wreathed in smiles, and eyes that sparkled with the brilliancy of by-gone days; but, alas! too soon to roll in horror, and glaze in the agonies of a terrible death, brought about by treachery and murder.

One article of the treaty was, that we should yield up our arms; and accordingly so soon as the surrender was made, we were left entirely at the mercy of our foes. The night following our surrender passed off quietly; and contrary to the expectation of some, who at first apprehended treachery,

the Mexicans treated us with great care and kindness, and every suspicion was lulled to rest. But it was only the deceitful calm which hangs around some ill-fated vessel and glasses the sea, ere the terrible winds burst upon and hurl her to destruction.

The morning following our surrender we were all marched out together, for the purpose as stated, of making provision for, and embarking us on our homeward voyage. Never, during my whole campaign, had I seen so many really happy faces among my companions. Some sung, some danced, some smiled, as it were to themselves; but each appeared in his own peculiar way uncommonly exhilarated.

The course which we took led to a large open plain or prairie, some two or three miles distant from our encampment, whither we were conducted by a party of armed Mexicans, and where we arrived in something less than an hour. Ere we reached the plain, we were somewhat startled and surprised, many of us, by seeing large bodies of armed Mexican soldiers and guerrillas moving about as if stationing themselves on the outskirts of an imagined circle. This alarmed some of our superior officers, who instantly demanded of our conductors the meaning—and were answered that it was only a military parade, gotten up by order of Santa Anna, for the purpose of making a display and showing off his knowledge of military tactics—knowing that we would be likely to give a description of it in the public prints, when we reached the United States. This was all natural enough, for Santa Anna was known to be a vain man (as events have since proved him a great diplomast and coward) and again suspicion was lulled, if not entirely discarded;—at least we endeavored to make it appear so, for we knew we had gone too far to retrograde, were entirely at the mercy of our captors, and did not wish to think they meant to act towards us a dishonorable part:—yet notwithstanding all this, there were many serious and some pale faces, as we slowly neared the ill-fated spot, and none appeared in the hilarious spirits with which we had

As we marched upon the ground selected for our destruction, we again perceived, with considerable alarm, that the soldiers on the outskirts of what appeared a large circle, gradually marched in toward the centre, thereby narrowing it and making their columns more dense as they approached us. We now began to see—but alas! too late—that something terrible was about to follow; for now that there was no longer any need of caution on the part of the dastardly cut-throat Mexicans, we perceived their faces grow dark with malignant and hellish expressions of triumph, their ugly brows lower, and their black snake-like eyes look red and fiery with their thirst for blood. A few moments of awful suspense, and the bloody signal was given; and then began a scene of horror God send I may never witness again! From all sides, with a simultaneous yell of horrible ferocity, more like the supposed yell of Hell's demons than earthly inhabitants, they, armed to the teeth, mounted and on foot, rushed in upon us weak, defenceless beings, and the inhuman ferocious butchery of the innocent victims was begun.

At first, so horror stricken and taken by surprise was I, that I stood perfectly still, unable I believe for some minutes to have moved, even had I seen the blow about to fall which was to launch me into eternity. Then I started, and every sense seemed more acute for its previous paralyzation. Oh, horror of horrors! what an awful work was going on around me!! My countrymen, my companions, were falling by tens, even by hundreds, beneath the red reeking blades of their treacherous foes; while shrieks, groans, and the most horrible yells and curses resounded on every hand. At this moment of carnage, I saw a mounted Mexican rushing towards me with a drawn sabre in one hand and a pistol in the other.

Expecting death at every moment, I as it were instinctively—for I do not think I reasoned on the subject—looked around for some means of escape, when, to my joy, I saw a dead Mexican by my side, killed I never knew how, with a cutlass and pistol in the belt around his waist. Now, thought

I, here is a chance left for fight, and I will sell my life as dearly as possible. To spring to the dead soldier and seize upon his weapons, was the work of an instant ; and the next to look to my own defence, for my adversary was already close upon me. As I turned, I saw him leveling his pistol, and again, as it were instinctively, I threw myself upon the earth, just as the weapon went off, the ball of which, though whizzing close to my head, left me untouched. This movement, simple as it was, saved my life ; for seeing me fall, my adversary of course believed me wounded, and knowing by my uniform that I was an officer, he doubtless thought he should find upon my person something of value, and accordingly he dismounted, and holding his horse by the bridle, was about to proceed in his search, when, with a movement quick as lightning, I raised my pistol and shot him dead. As



MASSACRE NEAR GOLIAD, AND THE ESCAPE OF LIEUT. HARRISON.

he fell, I grasped the reins of his steed, and swinging myself into the saddle, cutlass in hand, I dashed through the ranks of the enemy, cutting and slashing at all I met, until by some means, by some preservation almost miraculous, I found myself outside of the horrible circle, on the open

plain. I looked back and saw I was observed by some five or six mounted Mexicans, who wheeling their horses in the direction, darted forward to cut me down. It would have been madness in me to think of coping with such odds, and therefore without hesitation, I struck my horse upon the flanks with my sabre, and the next moment, with the speed of the wind, I was bounding over the plain, with my pursuers spurring and shouting in the rear.

The animal which Providence had given me, I now found to my great delight, was of the most valuable kind; for with great strength and bottom, he combined what to me at that time was the most important of all, namely, speed. Away, away we flew, my courser and me, like the frightened deer from the huntsmen and hounds, and for two good hours, I could hear the hallooing of my blood-thirsty pursuers. At the end of the time mentioned the sounds grew fainter and more faint, when I ventured to check my steed, and turn upon my saddle to reconnoitre. To my great relief and joy, I saw the animals which bore my enemies were beginning to flag, and their riders, in despair of overtaking me, seemed by their gestures on the point of pulling up and turning back. This a few minutes after they did do, and I was left free to choose what course and pace I pleased.

Now it was that I felt in its full force what an awful fate I had escaped; and while I thanked God for my own wonderful preservation, I could not avoid shedding tears at the thought of what had befallen my poor unfortunate companions. For a couple of hours more I rode along at a leisure pace, my mind principally occupied with the foregoing events. During this time I had paid no attention to the course of my beast, nor scarcely thought of the perils to which I was still exposed—so trifling did they appear in comparison to those I had just escaped. I was at length aroused from my reverie to consider of my present situation, by finding my horse on the point of entering a deep brush wood; and I now seriously began to bethink me of my future course, in order to reach

the United States, and avoid strolling parties of plunderers, who I knew infested the surrounding country. I judged it better not to enter the wood, and accordingly I turned my horse—which to my regret I found somewhat lame from my morning's ride—back upon the plain, and in what I considered a north-easterly direction.

Scarcely had I advanced a mile in this point of compass, when I perceived two horsemen far away to the right, who seemed from their actions reconnoitering my movements and preparing to follow me. I knew enough of guerrilla management to be certain that if I attempted to flee, or showed any signs of fear, I should be pursued—in which case I would certainly be overtaken, as my beast was too much fatigued to escape their fresh horses. Accordingly I feigned indifference, and did not alter nor quicken my pace, which I could see by their movements, so far disarmed suspicion, that they halted and finally turned their horses in another direction.

I was just congratulating myself on my lucky escape, when, on looking again, I perceived they had altered their direction, from what cause I never learned, and were now bearing down upon me at full speed. There was no hope for me now but to outrun them; and without further delay I put my noble animal to his full wind. For some four or five miles my gallant steed bore up well, and my pursuers had gained on me but little, if any, and I was beginning again to hope in my final escape, when, alas! I felt my poor beast begin to falter. No sooner did my followers perceive this, than they set up a yell of delight; and goading on their horses, soon came up within a few feet of me, when one of them threw a *lasso** over my head, and I was suddenly jerked to the earth.

The fall I received stunned me, and when I regained my senses, I found myself mounted on a powerful charger, and

* *Lasso*, (or as pronounced by the Mexicans *Lassaretta*) is a long stiff rope, with a noose at one end, which many of the Mexicans can throw over the head of a running animal, with the same certainty that an Indian throws his tomahawk.

lashed to a dark-browed, swarthy Mexican, who was bearing me away I knew not whither, at a speed almost fearful. Why my life had been preserved, I was for a long time unable to conjecture ; for I had expected instant death, if taken, and looked for no milder treatment. At last I determined on addressing my captor with regard to my destiny ; and as I understood a smattering of Spanish, I put the question to him in that language, and received for answer, that I was destined for the mines.

“Oh horror of horrors!—the mines!—the living graves!” I cried with vehemence: “Oh! give me death!—a thousand deaths were preferable to such an awful fate!” and the more I thought upon it, the more I envied the fortune of my companions at Goliad, until I actually begged of my captor to shoot me on the spot. His only answer to this, was a grim smile, which conveyed all I had ever conceived of the smile of a fiend incarnate.

As my story is destined to be somewhat brief, I shall not dwell here in detail, but proceed to lay before the reader such matter as will be likely to prove most interesting. Without describing the hardships I endured on my journey, the inhuman treatment I received from my captor, or the various means I employed to effect my escape,—but all to no purpose, and which, if properly narrated, would fill a volume—I shall pass over two months of my captivity, during which period I had been sold,—actually sold as a slave—and, in company with some half a dozen others, most of whom I found were Americans, been chained together in a band, and driven like beasts of burden, over burning sands, through tangles, brushwood and streams, with scarcely any food, with no covering to our feet, and barely a rag of clothes to conceal our nakedness, for a distance of several hundred miles, to the wild mountainous region of the far-famed Sierra Madre.

On our route I remember we passed through the towns of Monterey and Saltillo—places which have since become somewhat noted,—the former for the hard struggle with which our

little army fought their way into its well garrisoned streets, and dislodged the Mexicans; and the latter for being near the ever memorable spot where was fought the desperate battle of Buena Vista, whereby my countrymen gained unfading laurels.

One incident occurred at the latter place, which, as it came near proving fatal to me, I will here mention. It was night when we arrived at Saltillo, and so dark that I had no opportunity of examining the town, and could only judge of its size by the length of the street through which we were forced to march. We passed completely through the main part, and were quartered for the night in a dirty, squalid inn, on the outskirts of the village. As usual in such cases, we were all put into one apartment, chained together as we were, and left to shift for ourselves, after receiving our quantum of meat and water, which were far from being wholesome, and which were put before us in much the same manner that a gentleman feeds his kenneled hounds, though absolutely with less respect than is shown to the latter. After this the doors and windows were all strongly barricaded, and we left, as I said before, to pass the night as best we might, by sleeping together in chains upon the bare ground, which was not unfrequently damp and muddy—such a thing as a floor of wood being seldom seen in houses of the class described.

Now, it so chanced, that when our keeper came in with a rude light to leave us our food, I saw upon the sill of the only window in the apartment, what I thought was a bar of iron; and the thought flashed upon me at once, that with this perchance we might be able to separate our chains, and by some good fortune, effect our escape, though the latter took more the shape of wild hope, than any real expectation.—Accordingly, as soon as the keeper was gone, I made known my discovery and hopes to my companions, and we all proceeded to the window together. Imagine, reader, our joy, when we found in the supposed bar of iron, an excellent file, which having been used in the room for some purpose, had

accidentally been left there, as we thought and felt at the time, by an All-wise Providence for our liberation.

So overjoyed did some of my companions now become, at the thought of being speedily liberated, that it was no small effort to restrain their hilarity sufficiently to prevent ourselves from being overheard by our keeper, in which case, I knew all would be lost. Taking the file into my own keeping,—to which I had a right as being the first to discover it,—I waited until I thought all were asleep, and then began the work of liberation. We were chained together by an iron belt, passing around each waist, from which extended a heavy iron chain, from one to the other, leaving our limbs entirely free. I began by filing off my own belt, which, although some two inches wide, was not very thick ; so industrious and powerfully did I labor that, in the space of half, or at least three-quarters of an hour, I had cut it through. Two of the strongest of our party then took hold of it, and by pulling different ways, succeeded in springing it apart sufficiently to let me pass out. In this manner we proceeded to liberate each of the others, and a little before daylight we were all clear of our chains. But now how were we to effect our escape ? There was no way, but by a bold movement, which the most sanguine of us could scarcely hope would result in any thing but death to ourselves.—Even this was better than our present mode of life, and we resolved to regain our liberty, or perish in the attempt. Our plan was to knock our keeper down whenever he should appear among us, and then with our chains in our hands, as our only weapons, rush out and leave the rest to chance.

Now, it so turned out, that our keeper having heard a noise in the night, had applied his ear to a crack in the partition, and discovered our whole design. He then immediately went and collected a band of ruffians, called in Mexico, *leperos*, (a class of mendicants, who are ever ready to do anything for money, from playing a simple game of cards, to assassinating a person in the dark,) and silently stationed them

at the door of our apartment, all armed to the teeth, with orders to shoot down every one that attempted to escape, but otherwise remain peaceable. Our keeper then stationed himself before the door, with a long bludgeon, ready to strike down the first one that should appear after it was opened.

Now, as I had thus far been the leader in the insurrection, it was put upon me to stand forward by the door, and the moment our keeper entered, to knock him down with a chain, gag and bind him, take his weapons, (he always carried pistols in his belt,) and then rush out and escape, if possible. For this part of my performance all was prepared, and just as it began to grow light, we heard some one approaching the door, and a moment after, the sliding back of bolts, and the jingling of chains, announced it to be our keeper. Now was the all-important moment, and I stood ready to execute my task, when suddenly the door swung back, a man bounded forward, and the next moment I was felled to the ground, by a blow that would scarcely have failed to bring down an ox; while over my prostrate body sprang the broad, powerful and athletic form of our keeper, pistol in hand, exclaiming, in broad Spanish, as he pointed it from one to another of my companions, to keep them back, "You d—n—d miscreant rebels! your plot is all discovered, and if you make the least resistance you shall be tied to a wild horse and dragged to death!" and, as he concluded, he pointed to the ruffian band, who had by this time filled up the door-way.

As resistance now would lead to the most brutal treatment, perhaps murder, and as every one felt a desire to live a little longer, each one threw down his chains, and surrendered himself prisoner, without a single struggle for liberty. The result of the whole affair was, that our chains were again put on, with the addition of a chain and ball extra, which was attached to each right leg of my companions, and to both of my own, as being the leader, and that our backs smarted to the tune of twenty-five lashes.

After various hardships, which would fill a volume to enu-

merate, we arrived at the Sierra Madre, in the northern part of the state of Durango, sometime in the beginning of June, 1836. Without delay, we were at once taken to the mines, and from this time began a career of hardship and suffering, to which all I had hitherto undergone was light in comparison.

The mine where I was set to work, with three of my companions,—the other two being sent to another place,—was about seven hundred feet below the surface of the earth. Although in a country where the climate was so warm that snow was never seen, yet so cold was it in the mine, arising from the damp, the depth, and the mineral with which we were surrounded, that I felt all the chillness of an ice-house.

A crazy old ladder led down into this subterraneous vault, which was rotten and mildewed with age, and so slippery with muddy slime, that on my descent, I came twice within an ace of falling and dashing my brains out on the rocks below,—an event which I, an hundred times after, wished had taken place.

So soon as we were arranged in this gloomy hole, from which it was designed, by our keeper, we should never emerge while living, never behold the bright sun again, nor breathe the pure air of heaven, we were each assigned a certain task, that must be executed by a certain time, or we be subjected to the lash, which was ever laid on with no sparing hand.

So much had I suffered on my journey, from various hardships inflicted, and so worn down and wasted, from long marches and little food, and the dragging of my heavy iron balls, was I, that when I arrived at my journey's end, I was scarcely able to stand upon my feet; and was, by far, a more fitting subject for the hospital than the workhouse. Notwithstanding this, as I said before, my task was assigned me, and whenever I failed to perform it, which I often did, from sheer exhaustion and inability, my back was made the receptacle of a dozen lashes, until at last it became entirely raw, and

then healed over and became callous, like the palm of a person's hand after being subjected to hard labor.

To give the reader a perfect idea of the mines of Mexico, the labor of the prisoners, their food and lodging, and the inhuman treatment they receive from their masters,—the latter more especially,—will, I fear, be no easy task, and one which I feel myself incapable of performing; nevertheless, to the best of my ability, I will endeavor to do so.

First and foremost, then, let the reader descend with me into the bowels of the earth, from five hundred to a thousand feet, down a passage narrow and dark, and cold, and damp, with the air so close and noxious to the smell as almost to stifle breathing, and alight upon earth or rock that feels icy and slimy under your feet. The passage you descend gradually widens from the mouth or entrance, until what, at first, you found only a few feet in diameter, spreads to an extent sometimes of several acres. At the bottom you find yourself in a large, awful cavern, through which, in every direction, you see red, gloomy lights, flitting to and fro, and dark, shadowy forms, with pale, haggard faces, like grim specters in some horrible vision, passing hither and thither, and hear harsh, discordant voices, now in low murmurs, now in loud blasphemies, sometimes mingled with shrieks and groans, as some poor victim is being scourged by his inhuman master, combined with the hundred clinking hammers of the miners, the whole together forming one of the most dismal, heart-rending, abhorrent scenes on which the eye of man ever dwelt.

Such is the general appearance of the mine to one on his first introduction; but this is a beautiful picture, compared to what he will yet see and suffer, if unfortunately he happens to be a prisoner, sent there to eke out a miserable existence.

As I said before, each prisoner has a task assigned to him, and this is as much labor as an ordinary person can perform in sixteen out of the twenty-four hours, thereby leaving him only eight hours, or one-third of his time, for eating and sleeping; and, if, through sickness or any other inability, his task is not

completed, he is sure of receiving from three to a dozen lashes on his naked back, when the overseer comes round to examine his day's work ; and, as is not unfrequently the case, deprived of his ration of food for the night ; which latter is always the heaviest penalty, as, by this means, the poor fellow becomes so exhausted, that, ten to one, he fails in his task the following day.

These rations consist of a pound and a half of coarse black bread, made from bran, together with a quart of muddy, brackish water, and are distributed only twice a day, morning and evening—the laborer receiving nothing, from the time he goes to work, until he quits at the expiration of his task, or sixteen hours. His bed is nothing more than a small quantity of weeds, resembling rushes, which is thrown on the ground beside a rock, to which is attached a large iron chain, that by a collar is fastened to his neck, and keeps him in his place till morning. This collar is put on and taken off by the overseer, night and morning, who, also, for farther security, before he goes to his employment, attaches to his leg a heavy iron chain, which he is obliged to drag after him wherever he goes, and through all his laborious employment. The bed, or nest, (by whatever title it should be distinguished,) of which I have just made mention, is often placed so as to be continually wet by the drippings from the rock overhead, in which case, the poor occupant has no choice, but to lie in the cold and damp for a few hours of feverish, horrible dreamings, (I will not call it sleep,) and then, stiff and wretched, and in extreme misery from rheumatism, be forced to rise and drag himself through his daily task. And, reader, consider, this is not only for one day, or one week, but for months, for years, in fact until death comes to give him freedom, and you will form a slight—mind you, I say it in all assurance—only a slight idea of what a prisoner must undergo in the mines of Mexico—away from home, and friends, and sympathy, without a single ray of hope to light the cheerless, awful gloom of his destiny.

Having given you, reader, a brief sketch of the general appearance of the mine and its occupants, I shall now proceed to individualise somewhat, in order to show you single cases, which, ordinary enough in their combination, are still a little out of the regular routine. For this purpose I shall begin with myself; and doubtless what I suffered in person, will be sufficient; but if not, I can record of others, what came beneath my own observation, enough to fill a volume of two hundred pages.

I had been in the mines about a year, subject to all the insults, abuse, privations, sufferings and brutal treatment of which I have spoken, when one day my overseer came to me where I was at work, and in a gruff manner demanded the amount of my task. Now my business was to cut so many feet in the solid rock, by means of a hammer and chisel, and accordingly I replied to him the number of feet assigned me.

"And when was this given out, slave?" demanded he again. As he called me slave, I felt my blood boil; and just at that moment I would have given a fortune, had I possessed it, to have had him on an equal footing beyond the reach of assistance, just out of the bounds of the United States; but under the present circumstances I knew I must curb my temper, and accordingly I made answer, in as mild a tone as possible, that I believed it was some six months ago.

"Six months, you sluggard!" cried he, "and why have you not had your task increased?" (as though I wished for more labor.)

"Because," I answered, "it is as much as I am able to perform, taking one day with another."

"That, you knave, is a d——d lie, and you know it; cried he, fiercely; you could do a quarter more, if you chose, and by ——! I'll make you do two feet more, or I'll lash your back raw! Remember your extra two feet." And with this he walked away, just in time, I do believe, to save his life; for had he staid one minute longer, with his taunts, I

have no doubt I should have beat out his brains with my hammer.

I knew, however, that if my extra work was not performed, I should have the dozen, and very likely be deprived of my ration; and hard as my task now was—for the task I had hitherto executed was as much as I could do with ordinary steady labor—I sprung to it with all my might, and by great exertion succeeded in accomplishing it that day. When the overseer came round, he measured, and finding it was all right, went off muttering: “I knew the d—d lazy whelp could do it if he chose.”

I performed my task the next day, and the next; but on the fourth, from being somewhat ill, I was totally unable to accomplish it; and in consequence I received a dozen, and what was more, as I had anticipated, was deprived of my night's ration; from which cause I became so weakened that I failed again on the day following, and again suffered the like brutal treatment. The third day produced the same results, when the overseer became so exasperated, at what he termed my wilful laziness, that he said I should be sent to the *black hole* for punishment.

Accordingly, I was taken, stripped entirely naked, and, after receiving my regular dozen, was carried to an out-of-the-way place, where a trap door was raised, through which I, with two fifty pound weights fastened to each leg, and another around my neck, was lowered, by a rope being passed around my breast under my arms, to the depth of fifty feet, into a place so narrow that I could not turn round, and scarcely move; and there, almost suffocated, was left twenty-four hours in that cramped situation, without a morsel of food, when I was drawn up, and sore and suffering as I was, again ordered to go through with my task. Failing in this, as a matter of course, I was again sent to the black hole, and again went through the same horrible punishment. This was executed three times, by which means I was reduced so low, that I could not stand—when my inhuman keeper, either

through compassion, or what is more probable, the fear of losing me, (in which latter case, if proved to be his fault, he would be held responsible, and forced to pay my ransom amount, or be discharged,) ordered me to lie in bed one week, during which time I had my full rations regularly, and, astonishing as it may appear,—and I own it does so, even to myself,—at the end of this time I was so far recovered, that I was able to resume my work. Whether the monster thought my latter task too great, or whether he had some slight compunctions of conscience, and thought I had been sufficiently punished, I do not know, but from this time nothing more was said concerning the extra two feet.

In the mine where I worked, I should judge, there were, to say the least, one hundred prisoners; but who they were, whence they came, what misfortune or crime placed them there, or how long they had been in captivity, were matters I could never learn, as I was allowed to speak to no one save the overseer, under penalty of a dozen lashes—such being the rule. Some of them I presumed to be my own countrymen, who had, like myself, been taken prisoners of war, while their friends were mourning them as dead,—by far the happier fate of the two. Many of them, no doubt, were convicts, under the laws of Mexico, and sent there instead of to the scaffold, (the mildest form of punishment,) to finish the remainder of their days. Whatever, or whoever, they were, heaven knows they suffered punishment sufficient to atone for all crimes, however great. From the moment they enter, until their release, escape, or death,—and the latter, in nineteen cases out of twenty, is the most certain of the three,—they never behold the sun, the light of day, or breathe a single draught of pure air, or drink a single cup of pure water.

What an awful fate! can any one conceive one more horrible? Buried alive, wept for as dead, yet undergoing all the horrors of a thousand deaths; with the maddening thoughts of home, and friends, in a far off land, enjoying all the pleasures and comforts of life; with no hope of escape; drag-

ging on from day to day their laborious tasks; hungry, and faint, and stiff, and chill, and smarting beneath the torturing lash, or writhing under the taunts, gibes and insults of their cursed tormentors. What more truly awful than this?

When a prisoner dies—and it not unfrequently happens that they die under the lash, for not performing the task of which illness has rendered them incapable,—they are placed in a coarse sack—of which numbers are kept on hand prepared for the purpose—sowed up, and then drawn up by the windlass used for drawing up minerals, and thrown into some pit, pond, or river, as the case may be. If supposed to be sick with any contagious disorder, they do not always wait for them to die, but sack them alive—thus adding murder to the list of crimes—under the plea that this course is necessary to the preservation of the rest. Whenever sick, no matter from what cause, they are generally left to get well, or die, according to chance, unless the person sick should happen to be a remarkably good workman, whom they fear to lose, when a little extra care is bestowed upon, and some medicine given him.

When I say *they*, I am referring to the overseers, of whom every ward contains two or more, and each ward some eight or ten prisoners—thus making in the mine to which I allude, some ten or twelve wards, and some thirty overseers. The object of keeping so many, is to prevent insurrection, and enforce their inhuman laws on every occasion. They always go armed with pistols and knives, which they sometimes use on the slightest provocation, and when absolutely unnecessary. A case in point I will here detail.

The victim was a young man about my own age at that time—twenty-eight—who had by some misfortune (I do not think he was guilty of crime) been doomed to this living grave. I saw him when he was brought in and given in charge of my overseer, consequently occupying the same ward as myself. I at once saw by his eye and general demeanor, that he was a high-spirited, bold, daring, reckless fellow, who was not likely to be broke into the traces without

causing considerable trouble. When his portion of labor was given out, and he was told that unless so much was accomplished he would be punished with the lash, I noticed a dark gleam in his eye, and a proud smile of scorn linger around his mouth, as he paused to look after the retreating form of the overseer. He then began his task, and, as it proved to be somewhat of an easy one, fulfilled it. Matters thus passed on for a week or ten days, and I began to think I was mistaken with regard to any trouble occurring between him and the overseer, when one day the latter told him that his labor must be increased,—that he was now somewhat broke in, and could do more; to which the young man replied, that whether he could or not, he certainly should not.

"We'll see about that, you insolent slave!" cried the overseer in wrath, prefixing to slave a profane adjective; and at the same time striking the other a blow with his whip.

"Ha!" cried the young man, with a fierceness that rings in my ears even now, while he fairly foamed at the mouth with passion: "Ha! dog!" and with the word he leaped forward, and by a well directed blow of his fist, ere the other had time to parry or step aside, struck him between the eyes, and felled him to the earth; and then, with a sullen look, folded his arms on his breast, and coolly eyed the other as he arose, no doubt anticipating the awful fate that was to follow.

Deliberately the overseer arose; deliberately he drew a pistol from his belt, and walking up to the young man, who never flinched or betrayed fear by the movement of a muscle, placed the muzzle against his forehead, and shot him dead. He fell without a groan.

This transpired within fifteen feet of me, in the second year of my captivity, and, as may naturally be imagined, produced anything but a pleasant sensation. I might go on and enumerate an hundred instances of cruelty and oppression, no less revolting than those already detailed; but they would not benefit the reader—who has already seen enough to have no

desire to be a miner—and would occupy too much space beside: therefore I shall close my narrative with the particulars of my final eventful escape.

From some secret cause, of the wherefore of which I am unable to give a reason, I never at any period of time, after my incarceration in that dungeon of horrors, considered myself as hopelessly lost; and I looked upon my escape as something that would certainly occur, though at what period of my life I could not determine. Why I thought this, I say, I am unable to explain; for to all appearance I was doomed forever; but think it, I did; and it was this thought which saved me more than once when on the point of putting an end to my existence. And doubtless a vague something of the kind was felt by my companions in misery; otherwise I cannot account for their bearing up so well and long under their hardships; for heaven knows that death in any shape would be preferable to a life of such a kind, without a hope of escape.

I had now been several years a captive in the mines, during which time I had watched closely for an opportunity to escape, but without success. This was not mistrusted by my overseer; for I had taken good care to appear resigned to, if not contented with, my lot. So well had I succeeded in this, and so well was I liked for my previous good conduct, that for two or three of my last years there, my task instead of being increased was lessened; and instead of being inhumanly scourged for a failure in performing my part, I received only a reprimand, with an injunction to do better in the future. Nevertheless, as may be imagined, I was far from feeling contented with my situation, and only looked upon this as a hope of eventually being able to get free. At last the all important time came, as I will now narrate.

It so happened that another mine, which was newly commenced, and which was some half a mile distant from the one I have described, required some blasting of rock in order to prepare it for the regular miners. As hands were scarce

at this time, and as the mine was owned by the same company for whom I labored, it was resolved by them to select three of their best and most trusty workmen for this purpose. In this instance fortune favored me, and I, with two others, received the joyful tidings that we should again be brought above ground, if only for the purpose of again plunging us into another living grave. And now it was that I firmly resolved, if there should seem so much as a remote probability of succeeding, to attempt my escape.

Never shall I forget the wild indescribable thrill of delight with which I again beheld the light of day, after being buried in the prime of manhood, for several years, from the world and all its enjoyments. The former years of my life—my boyhood days—spent in happy innocence—now seemed to rush upon me in the form of some beautiful vision, which could never have existed, other than as a stern reality.

With what unbounded delight I gazed upon the sun—the sky—the trees—the flowers—the streams—in fact every thing seemed to possess a charm I had never observed before; and I could hardly realize that I should not soon wake from this enchantment, to the horrible reality I have detailed.

In the course of half an hour, we arrived, well guarded, at the mine in question, which, as I said before, being newly worked, was very small in comparison to the one I had just left, and only about forty feet deep. As the new overseer, to whom we were given in charge, had received a rather flattering account of us from our late master, with a recommendation not to treat us harshly, and as he, withal, was a rather humane man, considering his occupation, it was not deemed necessary to put weights to us during the day, but only to secure us with chains at night, when our labors were completed. This gave us great freedom of limb, and we could work with far greater ease and facility.

To counterbalance our apparent freedom, our labors were far more dangerous; for, being confined to our vaults, even while in the act of blasting, we had to secrete ourselves be-

hind juttings of the rocks, with great speed and care, to avoid the dangerous missiles thrown off by the explosion. Notwithstanding this, we worked on for several days, without any accident occurring, though twice during the time I barely escaped losing my life. Matters thus ran on smoothly for some two or three weeks; I, in the meantime, unbeknown to my companions, was secretly watching an opportunity of gaining my liberty,—when one night, just as our tasks were completed, our overseer appeared to us in a state bordering on intoxication, and began abusing us shamefully, swearing that we were a lazy set, and that the next day we must perform double the amount of our usual labor, or take a dozen a-piece. To this I made no reply, but my companions did, for which they were severely chastised, when our overseer had got them chained; he still possessing sense and cunning enough not to strike until he had them secure. I will here mention, by the way, that the last work we had performed that day, was the laying of a train to a large blast, with which we intended to commence our labors on the morrow. In the vicinity of this train, how near to it I do not know, was left a keg of powder, which of course was to be removed to a more secure place in the morning, before the train was fired. I mention this circumstance, merely because it doubtless proved the means of saving my own life, while I fear, it sent my fellow workers into eternity.

Now, it so happened that I was the last whom the overseer approached for the purpose of chaining for the night: and as I had been watching his drunken movements very closely, it suddenly occurred to me, that if I could succeed in knocking him down, senseless, and while in that state, strip him and robe myself in his own apparel, before he recovered, I might, perhaps, pass the sentinel at the mouth of the mine, by imitating his drunken swagger, and escape amid the darkness beyond the reach of pursuit. It was a desperate movement, I knew, and one, if I failed in, would be sure to be followed by instant death. Nevertheless, no sooner had it oc-

curred to me, than I determined to put it in practice, or die where I stood, for life without liberty, I felt, was a burden I had borne long enough.

To ease my conscience in the matter, no sooner had the overseer reached me, than he began to abuse me, applying to me many harsh epithets, and ended by striking me on the side of my face with the flat of his hand. Had no resolution been formed on my part of the nature just detailed, I could not have borne up under the insult while my limbs were free, without some retaliation ; but in the present instance, it just answered my purpose, and, with my blood boiling at a fever heat, I caught up an iron bar which was lying on a rock beside me, and with a powerful blow, quick as lightning, stretched him senseless on the ground. The next instant, in compliance with my previous design, I raised and supported him with one hand, while with the other, I stripped off his coat, which I immediately transferred to my own person, and seizing his hat, placed it upon my head, and, while my companions were looking on, awe-struck, and speechless, darted to the ladder, and rushed up in haste.

In this movement I had not a moment to spare ; for scarcely had I gained the mouth of the mine, when I heard the voice of the overseer, shouting hoarsely in broad Spanish :

"Come here, you d——d sneaking rascal, or I'll shoot you dead !"

"Why, Henrique," said the sentinel, addressing me, whom he mistook for the overseer, "the knaves down yonder must be good imitators, for one of them hits you off remarkably."

As he concluded, and ere I had time to answer, even had I been so disposed, we heard the report of a pistol, and almost simultaneously a terrible explosion, which shook the ground beneath our feet like the throes of an earthquake.

"Great God !" exclaimed the sentinel, "they have blown up the mine, and are doubtless all killed !" and he at once darted away to call assistance, while I, profiting by the opportunity, darted off in the opposite direction, to make

good my escape,—which, thank God! I succeeded in doing.

Whether my companions were killed or not, I never learned—(though I think it most probable they were)—nor how the accident occurred. The latter, I conjecture, was brought about by a mistake of the overseer: who, on coming to his senses, was doubtless very much confused, and mistook one of my late companions for myself, who not answering to his call, as previously recorded, was fired upon, but with an aim so uncertain, that the charge took effect in the keg of powder—which was somewhere in that point of compass—and caused the great explosion. This, I repeat, is only conjecture, as the particulars, if known at all, I never learned.

After leaving the sentinel, I ran for two hours, before I paused,—so fearful was I of being pursued—when of a sudden it occurred to me how foolish I had been in not securing the weapons of the overseer, (which in my haste I had entirely overlooked) so that in case I was attacked I could defend myself. But a moment after, I bethought me it was doubtless providential I had not done so, as the catastrophe which followed would not have occurred, my escape would have been made known, and probably my capture or death would have been the consequence.

My course, as near as I could judge, was in a northerly direction, which I followed till daylight, when I found myself in a deep, wild gorge, of what I considered to be the Sierra Madre. Fearful of being discovered if I traveled by daylight, I crept into the fissure of a large rock, where I remained till night, and again resumed my journey. As yet I had eaten nothing since leaving the mine, and I now began to feel so weak and faint, that I finally abandoned my progress till daylight, hoping by that means to discover some roots or fruit, that would reinvigorate, and enable me to pursue my travels. In this I was not disappointed—for having heard that travelers in a strange country have sometimes found out what was not poisonous by observing what was eaten by birds and other

animals, I determined to follow their example, and the result proved entirely to my satisfaction.

On vegetables of various kinds I subsisted for three weeks, during which time I was not observed by a single human being, (though I saw several) so adroitly did I manage for fear of falling into bad hands. At last, to my unspeakable surprise and delight, I stumbled upon an encampment of American soldiers, whom I afterwards found to be under the command of Col. Doniphan—a gentlemanly officer—on their way from California across the mountains, to join the gallant little band of heroes under General Taylor, then somewhere in the neighborhood of the celebrated battle-ground of Buena Vista. As may be inferred, I lost no time in joining this body of soldiers, who after hearing my eventful story, received me with an enthusiasm which will ever ring joyfully in my ears to the latest day of my life, and from whom I first learned, to my great astonishment and joy, that Texas was annexed to the United States, and that a war was now waging in the heart of Mexico, that had already resulted in great glory to the American arms.

It may seem surprising to the reader, that I should not have heard of so important an event as a war with the very country in which I was a prisoner ; but to this latter fact let it be attributed, for were such a thing known in the mines of Mexico, it might perhaps lead to most disastrous consequences on the part of the owners, by animating and instigating the prisoners to rebellion ; consequently, it is policy of the most important kind for the former to keep the latter in ignorance of that, as well as all other events which are transpiring in the world at large.

As nothing of importance occurred to me individually after joining Col. Doniphan's command, and as his own adventures and exploits, will probably be forthcoming ere long, in the shape of a book, I shall not trespass longer upon the patience of the reader, (to whom I tender my thanks for following me through these humble pages, and hope he or she will consider

his or her time not entirely misspent,) but close by saying, that I arrived safely in New Orleans, about the middle of September, 1847, where, at the urgent solicitation of several of my friends I have been induced to commit the foregoing adventures to paper.

And, now, Reader, wishing you all health and happiness, and a long life, unmarred by such sufferings as mine, I respectfully bid you, Adieu.

E. J. HARRISON, *Lieut.*

New Orleans, October, 1847.







